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October 1902

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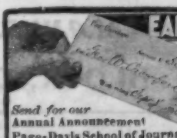

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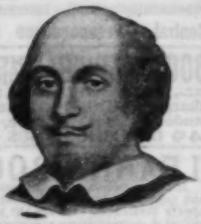

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According to Omar.*

BY EVE BRODLIQUE-SUMMERS.

RS. WILLIAM WINSLOW of the Sad Heart looked disconsolately down from her window in the Gray Palace Hotel. Bands brayed, horns tootled, fifes squeaked, handfuls of many-colored confetti flew into the clear air, spangling the white and yellow bunting, the gay red and ivory lanterns, and the flags of all nations — and of none — which fluttered and flew at every corner and cornice. Everywhere was the tinkle of laughter, the merry absurdities and motley garb of Carnival time. Beneath the lady's window a party of merrymakers disguised as Filipinos, in chocolate-colored tights and skirts of waving grasses, threw their javelins in mock combat, and did the mad — and maddening — steps of a supposititious war dance! Fairy-like children driving a flock of golden butterflies; a group of darkies with tambourines; a frantic Mephistopheles trying to control his fantastic following into something resembling a procession on the march, and the quips and quirks of very amateur clowns on the flower-decked "floats," alike proved powerless to relax the

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* The writer of this story received a cash prize of $300 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending February 26, 1902.

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frown between Mrs. William Winslow's very excellent brows. To be perked up in the glistering gallery of a Gray Palace, and participate no more than that in the great festival of mountain and of plain, was a mockery worse than hollow. All Rockland was *en fête*, and She of the Sad Heart thought it must be very jolly indeed, especially as she had never beheld the glories of Mi-carême, or Mardi-gras, or any of the other historic carnivals. But Mr. William Winslow said that the festival was very silly, belonging to a crude civilization which had not advanced beyond a childish desire for glaring colors and boisterous foolery. And when Mr. Winslow said things in that particular tone, the listener felt instantly that the edict was final; that there could be no court of appeal.

So every day Mrs. William Winslow of the Sad Heart sat, like Sister Anne, by her window, and watched for what might come. Every evening, with a sigh, she beheld the red ball of the glowing Colorado sun dip behind the round-shouldered mountains, until only a faint aureole remained; and then the great yellow amphitheatre blazed forth in competitive crimson and gold, the whole of its glitter backed by the stately glory of the white Capitol, studded with lights, amber and ruby and green, and topped by a blazing electric star! Then, through all the wide, cool streets ran the ribbons of light from gaily-colored Japanese lanterns, and from each overhead wire and pole dangled the white and gold of Carnival flags, mixed with line after line of rose-hued lamps.

There had been three days of this — three days of sunshine yellow as gold-dust, but crystal-clear as no earthly gold ever yet was, three crisp nights under a blue velvet sky glowing with polished stars — until now had fallen the maddest, merriest day of all, the day of the maskers, and to-night would close the Carnival with the masked ball and the choosing of its Queen.

Mrs. William Winslow's heart may have been sad, but it throbbed with amazing sprightliness to the waltz music coming up the street. A line of Nautch girls swung along to the sensuous strains, followed by a medley of clowns, Arabs, Indians, knights, tramps, Zulus, washerwomen, vivandières, cowboys, and even the grave seemed to have given up its dead, and sent forth skeletons in winding-sheets to join in the impromptu dance. It was a riot of color and a confusion of happy sound. On Mrs. Winslow's sensitive brain

every rollicking tune beat to the rhythm of the words she had noticed some ambitious young reporter "doing the fireworks" had used in his paper that morning:

Come fill the Cup, and in the fire of Spring
The Winter Garment of Repentance fling!
The Bird of Time has but a little way
To flutter — and the Bird is on the Wing!

Oh! make the most of what we yet may Spend
Before we, too, into the dust descend;
Dust unto dust, and under dust to lie
Sans wine, sans song, sans singer, and sans End!

She sighed; the spirit of the Tent-maker gripped her:

Oh! come with old Khayyam, and leave
The Wise to Talk —

She leaned farther over the narrow ledge of the parapet which the hotel people had made glad with white and yellow bunting. Just then a slender athletic figure in purple and ermine turned on his horse to throw a handful of confetti into the lap of a woman in white drawn in an automobile of white roses, apparently by a white dove, which she guided with a rein of white satin. As the horseman turned, he looked full into the wistful eyes of the Lady of the Sad Heart and, with a sudden impulse, threw the confetti to her instead, powdering her dark hair and sombre dress with its infinitesimal patches of red, yellow, purple, pink and blue. She laughed merrily at this, her first real contact with the Carnival, and her teeth were white and pretty. The man in purple and ermine evidently liked to look, for he lingered a perceptible moment, making his horse curvet handsomely before the lady, but alas! was incontinently jostled by a Robin Hood in Lincoln green, intent upon joining Priscilla, the Puritan. Abruptly the tinsel king raised his hand again, and Mrs. Winslow instinctively "ducked" to avoid another shower of the confetti. Instead, however, there had fallen into her lap with unerring aim a dainty mask of rose-color, with a four-leaved clover just between the eyes! Her impulse was to throw it back, but the Purple King, or Knight, or whatever he was, had travelled past in a crowd of lively grisettes, led by a delightful Pierrot, and the Lady of the Sad Heart was left with a new and most becoming flush on her cheek and a rose-hued

mask in her hand. Of course it was quite possible that the mask should prove harmless. So might Eve's apples, or Pandora's box or Marguerite's jewels have been. Mrs. Winslow might have regarded the thing merely as a pleasant souvenir, but alack! she had little taste that way, not being of the kind that chip stones from the Temple of Vesta, or beg for buttons off a soldier's coat.

She sighed, longingly: "If I could only put it to use!" Then, defiantly: "Why not?"

Daringly: "I would, too, if only I had a domino!"

Dejectedly: "I couldn't possibly get one at this late hour!"

Reflectively: "It would be absurd to go out with a mask, and in these dark clothes of mine — but — have I anything else?"

Triumphantly: "The rose-colored dressing-gown just from the modiste! It's an exact match!"

Determinedly: "I'll do it!"

Fearfully: "What would William say?"

Recklessly: "I — don't — care!"

Perplext no more with Human or Divine,
To-morrow's Tangle to the Winds resign!

"I will!"

. . . . . .

Mr. William Winslow had been in the habit of complaining that his wife took an unconscionable time to make her toilette, but he would have had no ground for such complaint had he seen her now. It was the work of only a few moments to don the resplendent rose-colored brocade dressing-gown, and in another moment She of the erstwhile Sad Heart was knotting its heavy cords of green silk around her waist and adjusting the rose-colored mask, which matched so perfectly that she declared piously to herself that it really seemed providential! But what should she do for headgear? Every domino had its hood. Then her eye fell on a lamp shade of rosy, crinkled tissue paper. In this dry climate the very thing! She bent the fantastic frilly thing into a more likely shape, secured it on her dark curls, stripped her fingers bare of tell-tale rings, ran down the gray stone of the Palace stairs to avoid the elevator men, flung her room key on the desk while the clerk was not looking, and flashed out into the gay street before she had time to think. A string of Harlequins and Columbines came

up the avenue, with "waving hands and woven paces." The Rose-colored Domino hesitated. A ray of glorious Colorado sunshine touched the rich brocade of her garment. A dozen beckoning hands were held out to her from the rollicking procession. She caught those of a resplendent Sappho, and falling into step with the mad music of the band, went dancing along with the rest, caste forgotten, conventionalism overruled. If at that time she gave a thought to the extremely proper Mr. Winslow, it was only to immediately reflect:

> Some for the glories of this World, and some
> Sigh for the Prophet's Paradise to come.
> Ah, take the Cash and let the Credit go,
> Nor heed the Rumble of a Distant Drum.

The experiences of that afternoon were picturesque and varied. Once Mrs. Winslow rode in a grotesque "float," where a party of temporary "niggers," hideously made up, were her noisy companions, and where the painted mountains were "rocky" in at least three senses. Her next experiment was to perch on a float which joggled horribly, and in its progress through the streets nearly shook out the white and curiously regular teeth of a stately young person who simulated a goddess, in silver paper and draughty cheesecloth. Then she came to terra firma again, and had wild amusement driving three big and marvellously feathered fowls, who crowed and cackled and scrunched along on ill-concealed patent leathers, the while they flapped their Brobdignagian wings. Once she was confetti-tender at the back of a chariot, wrought wholly — as far as outward semblance went — of pink and white asters. Lastly she rode with a tattered tramp in the "horse-mobile," a rickety vehicle with the shafts turned wrong side about, and the bony, patient horse pushing from the back instead of drawing the outrageous trap, looking gravely disgusted as only an animal can.

It was indeed Folly's parade, and the Lord of Misrule the sole monarch.

Certainly the Rose-colored Domino was popular. Perhaps something of this was due to the unusual richness of the garment, which caught the wandering eye at once, but more potent than this was the reckless joy of living which the wearer unconsciously

exhaled. Every one talked to her, and she chattered to every one in return. It was the maddest, the jolliest, the queerest day of her life. But, though she occasionally thought to look, never once did she catch sight of the Knight in purple and ermine, whose marked mask she so gaily wore.

The day waned. The brief Western twilight hung its dim flag over the jubilant city. The brightest of red brick houses showed but faintly pink against the dull emerald of the trees and the smoked pearl of the sky. Over the dark billows of the mountain range gleamed the faint silver crescent of a young moon, pure, virginal, swung from a single tremulous, exquisite star. It seemed as if Nature herself had put out her choicest decorations to grace the Carnival.

Now the six o'clock bell clanged, and the revellers dispersed, according to Carnival rules, as suddenly as Cinderella left the ball at the stroke of the midnight hour. Tinsel knights and ladies became everyday people for the next hour and a half.

But Mrs. William Winslow of the Rose Domino did not return to the Gray Palace. By this time she felt herself to be a part of the Carnival, and she did not now propose to relinquish the crowning glory of all — the masked ball and the choosing of its Queen. To be sure, the brocaded domino had no pocket, hence she had no available money, but in spite of the promptings of a healthy young appetite whetted by unusual exercise, she scoffed at the compensations of a dinner as compared with the glories of the ball. She would go without, and that cheerily. Still, she was hungry. A particularly unconvincing Comanche brave, sitting on the curb, proffered her his popcorn bag. She took a handful in the same frank spirit of *camaraderie*, and went on her way, munching the buttery morsels. A small boy, amazingly attired in a burro skin, offered her one of two big red apples, remarking, with a feeble attempt at a bray, that they were carrots, and good for all classes of donkeys. The lady pulled one of his long ears, but took the apple gratefully, deciding that, at this rate, she would scarcely miss her supper. Nothing more, however, came her way, and soon it was half-past seven, when all the city flowed with wine-colored lights, and maskers began to press forward towards the great shining amphitheatre.

It was, if possible, a more mad and rollicking sight than even that of the afternoon:

> We are no other than a moving row
> Of Magic Shadow-Shapes that come and go
> Round with the Sun-illumined Lantern held
> In Midnight, by the Master of the Show.

She passed along with the rest. There was no admittance fee, and the canvas-covered floor of the amphitheatre felt exquisitely smooth and firm to her dancing feet. Soon the flag-draped tiers of grand stand and boxes were inundated by a crowd of fashionable onlookers. No maskers in the seats, no one unmasked on the floor, so the edict ran. The Rose-colored Domino felt perfectly safe. Her soberly clad liege would not be permitted to approach nearer to her than the grand stand, even if he should do the unlikely thing, and venture to the Carnival ball to look for her. Besides, in this dress, from that distance, she was surely secure from recognition.

It was a great sight. The people alone would have made it that, but added thereunto was line after line of exquisite lights, shimmering like the many-hued native stones of the State — emerald, ruby, topaz, carnelian, turquoise — while over the roofless amphitheatre there hung the magnificent dark amethyst of the Colorado sky. A fresh mountain breeze cooled the cheeks of the dancers, but brought them no hint of chill, as they swayed to the music from the great white band-stand. It was a glorious out-of-door revel, as picturesque in its giant way as though it were a dance with fairy rings under the greenwood trees.

Opposite the blazing white of the band-stand and its tremendous sounding-board was the silver pagoda rising above a mimic throne. But as She of the Rose Domino and the Vagrant Heart turned to look, that very necessary chief organ of her circulation seemed to give a preposterous jump, and land in her throat. For, under the olive canopy which shaded the throne, and seated on one of the big gilded chairs, sat her Knight of the purple and ermine, and over his face, what she had not noticed at first, a rose-colored mask with a four-leaved clover between the eyes — the mate to her own.

Across the chair next him hung a magnificent sheaf of Amer-

ican Beauty roses, and beside it stood a dainty little page in pink satin doublet and hose, holding a glittering crown upon a satin pillow. On the step below the throne was the Court Chamberlain, gorgeously and stuffily upholstered in crimson velvet; next him came another little page in beruffled pink, and lastly a splendid Captain of the Guard, in white satin and velvet, holding a silver sword at rest. Out from the foot of the throne stretched a hapless company of girls, maids of honor chosen from each county in the State, and, happily, all in white, since the country dressmaker may not work such utter devastation with pure white as she could with an array of colors. Every one in the vicinity of the throne was in an attitude of waiting — for what? Mrs. William Winslow pondered, and wished to goodness she had another and a different mask. But it was quite too late to think of that. Either she must keep the one she already wore, or she must depart the place. She rather thought she would go, but a Cowboy, who looked natural enough to be the real thing, held out his hand enticingly for another waltz and, beguiled by the excellent music, she accepted. Away they whirled and, against her will, came nearer the throne. She saw the tinsel King look towards her, then call the Court Chamberlain, who in turn hurried toward the Captain of the Guard, who immediately stalked down among the dancers, carrying his shining sword before him like the flaming one of the Angel at Eden's gate, Mrs. Winslow thought, miserably, for she felt uncomfortable, though she really did not know why.

But when the Cowboy said — looking at the dazzling white figure approaching — "He is coming to choose a Queen for the revels; the King proclaimed that it should be done from the crowd!" she remembered the mark on her mask, and decided that it was quite, quite time for her to go home.

However, a crowd, like matrimony, is much easier to get into than to get out of, and in another wretched minute the white courtier was bowing low before her, and extending a gloved hand to lead her away. Escape was impossible. The Cowboy stood elated, beaming with reflected glory from his late partner. People were cheering, and crying "The Queen! the Queen!" and the poor little woman, oppressed to the dust by her unhappy exaltation, as many a real Queen has been before her, dropped one grimy and

reluctant little hand into the courtier's, and was led away to the throne. Once there, the shining Captain lifted her flapping lamp shade, and gently bade her kneel. Sullenly she bent her head before the King, who took the bauble crown from the little page, and placed it very awkwardly and nervously upon her head, saying something quite inaudible meanwhile. The white courtier skewered the crown to her hair with a jewelled pin, the King raised her to the other gilt chair by his side, with shaking fingers handed her the sheaf of roses, and the dancers, forming in line as in a grand march, began to pass before them, each making obeisance.

Poor Mrs. William Winslow was half crying. It was enough to make any tired and hungry woman hysterical. She had lost her lamp shade and had gained a crown, but how in the world was she ever going to get out of this without unmasking? And what right had that horrid King to choose her in such a sudden way? She looked at him viciously, but softened to perceive that he was manifestly as ill at ease and as nervous as herself. She determined to appeal to him and to his sense of mercy. The noise of the bands made speech difficult, and her voice was hoarse and unnatural from much use in the open air, but she would try.

"Why did you choose me?" she croaked, so abruptly that the poor King nearly jumped out of his shining boots.

"You — you — wore a mask," he faltered, in a voice nearly as strained as her own.

"Well, that isn't exactly flattering! It might have been, if you had chosen me for my face, but the mask —"

"I mean — the mark on it," sighed the wretched King.

"Ugh! It's a good deal like the brand of Cain, isn't it?"

"It was abominably hard to find," retorted the King tartly, "and Van Keefer couldn't give me the slightest idea of how you would be dressed."

"Van Keefer?"

"Oh, yes, now I've let the cat out of the bag I may as well own up. I'm not the real King. Van Keefer is. He was in the procession this afternoon, but was telegraphed for in a hurry, just as he came into the hotel café for dinner to-night. Interesting family event, I believe. He tore up to my room like mad. Begged me to lend him some quiet clothes to start off in — had to catch the

train in half an hour, and no time to get to his house before leaving for his father-in-law's home, whither he was summoned. No time to see any of this confounded Carnival committee, either! Now, Van Keefer and I, as you may have noticed, are about the same size, and it occurred to him that, as he could wear my business suit, I might as well wear his kingly clothes, and save the ball from going to the demnition bow-wows. He said that all I would have to do would be to look out for a mask like the one I am wearing, and crown its wearer Queen. He said he had given the mate of this to the prettiest girl he had seen this afternoon. He didn't seem to know much about the lady, or else he hadn't time to tell. He just said that if I couldn't find that marked mask by nine o'clock, I was to choose any dancer I liked, only to be sure that she wasn't a colored woman under her mask. That's all. It was a relief to me when I found you. But I wish I were well out of this, I — tell — you."

The uncomplimentary words seemed to pass the mimic Queen by, for she was smiling in the most frankly amused way, when she said suddenly:

"Is my crown on straight?"

"No"; said the King, with brutal candor, "it's horribly crooked. Shall I fix it?"

"No, indeed. Your hands are too nervous. You'd be sure to harpoon me with this big hat-pin. Guess I'll have to endure it. 'Uneasy goes the head that wears a crown' seems appropriate for me. But I never wanted to be a little tin Queen, anyway."

He sighed deeply. "I'd like to go way back and sit down. I hate this King business."

"Why?"

"Oh, several reasons; for instance, there's my wife —"

"Where?"

"I'm sure I don't know. That's partly what is worrying me. She wasn't in when I left. Very unusual."

"I sympathize. There's my husband —"

"Is he really?"

"Oh, no, I don't mean that man. My husband is at home, I expect, or else going up and down like a roaring something-or-other. Have you any idea when we can escape from this?"

"Not in the least. Let's consult with that bow-legged bit of plush furniture."

The over-stuffed and maligned Lord Chamberlain replied with ready grace to the rather surprising query: "Your Majesties will unmask to your loyal subjects before departing."

"No!" and "Not much!" their Majesties cried simultaneously.

The Lord Chamberlain looked puzzled even under his mask, and addressed himself to the King:

"It is customary, Your Majesty."

Then the sly-witted Lady of the Vagrant Heart interposed sweetly:

"Oh, very well. That will do. But first I should be so glad if I could get away for a moment to straighten my crown, and put a little powder on the end of my nose, to make myself presentable."

"And I'll escort you," said the listless King, with surprising alacrity.

The Lord Chamberlain moved by to let them pass, and the pages bent so low that it looked as if each small fellow was trying to touch his little toes with his little nose.

After they were safely and sneakily outside the great circle of the amphitheatre into the now almost deserted street, the King said:

"Of course you will let me find you a cab? And would you mind giving me a peep at your face before we say good-bye?"

"I shouldn't mind in the least," said she, and her voice sounded strangely familiar away from the noise of the dancers and the blare of the band; "because, you see, I've known you for the last half hour, Mr. William Winslow," and off the rose-colored mask came.

"Alicia," he gasped, "what does this mean?"

"Oh, dear, it will take so long to tell, and it does seem a bit complicated, doesn't it? In the first place, I suppose, your friend Mr. Van What's-his-name has peculiar views as to what constitutes beauty. Certainly, views I know you never shared. Secondly, old Omar Khayyam ought to be suppressed, human nature changed, and carnivals forbidden by law, if we are all to behave always in a staid, proper and sensible way. Thirdly, and surely best of all"

(her voice grew wheedling), "this seems to be one of Fate's pleasant little jests — we evidently were *made* for each other, and cannot escape our destiny. And, oh, how hungry I am! Won't you take me back to the Gray Palace café, and scold me after I have had my supper?"

She was irresistible, he thought, and yet:

"Ah, my Beloved, fill the Cup that clears
To-day of past regrets and future fears,"

she quoted pleadingly.

"All right," said her husband, falling in with the spirit of the toast, as they sat at a little round table beneath the shadow of their own particular palm-tree in that big semi-conservatory sort of a restaurant, where they could see the sparkle of the Carnival lights through the enormous windows. "I am not going to turn ruler again this evening. We are companions in motley, and I feel that I, too,

"Have drowned my glory in a shallow cup
And sold my reputation for a song."

. . . . . .

An interesting note in the morning papers said: "Their frolicsome Majesties, after receiving the homage of their court, descended from their golden throne, and mingled with the dancers, thus blending in the happiest manner the spirit of democracy with the pomp and circumstance of state."

"Oh, yes!" and "Marvellously accurate!" laughed Mrs. William Winslow of the Merry Heart:

"Turn down an empty glass!"

Deadman's Hook.*

BY ELLIOT WALKER.

IDGEDALE had been thinking about it for a long time. At first he had cast the gruesome notion from him in disgust, but it had made its impress upon some active atom of his brain, and daily strengthened with the ever-growing sense of some dreadful culmination to the awful worry which hung over him. Now the thought had mastered him, and he was siding with it and trying to gloss its horror with the aid of reason.

"Why isn't it the best thing, after all?" he meditated, "best for me and every one. It is only a question of time, the doctors say. Nobody knows it yet except the specialists and myself. Every day brings it nearer — soon I shall have to give up and linger along weakly to the end, an expense and burden. Now, while I am yet strong, I can arrange to drop out, with things in good shape and Ada and the children provided for; it might happen to any one. It's your duty, man," he thought roughly; "if you do not take this matter into your own hands, you will die regretting it with your last breath."

His mouth set and his brow contracted as he walked into his office. "My clients won't miss me much," he mused, rather bitterly. "A small practice, just a living — a lot of books — what a farce it is! Why didn't I take up medicine as I thought of doing? If I had, this thing would have been discovered long ago."

A rush of utter hopelessness swept him. "It's the only way — the only sensible way," he groaned; "it must be done. I'll make a clean job of it and work it carefully."

That afternoon Carter Ridgedale took out a goodly accident insurance policy in addition to what he already carried.

"It's robbery, I suppose, but they can afford to lose it better than I can afford to let my wife and children suffer," he ruminated.

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"I carry no life insurance. Always have meant to, but never got to it — too late now. Well, that's a start — now plan your course and never waver. Don't think, keep right on. Other men have done it — don't weaken. It's the only way." He steeled himself as he walked home.

"So this is the way criminals must feel when they are plotting murder and robbery!" He shuddered. "It's curious how a man can subjugate his real nature in a case of necessity like this. I feel a hard strength of purpose growing in me, now I have made up my mind. Who would ever think that I would go out of sight, smiling and cheating? I will not stay about the house. That may unman me. To-night I will make my arrangements. Thursday will be a good day to carry them out."

"You look tired and pale, dear," said Ada Ridgedale at the tea table. "Don't you feel well?"

"Oh! business worries me," answered her husband. "I get crazy to be outdoors at this season. I believe I will take a day and go trouting. I can take the afternoon train Wednesday and go down to the Gorge — it's only seven miles. I'll put up at Budd's little tavern, and fish Thursday. There are two good brooks there."

"I wish you would, Carter. It will do you worlds of good," cried Ada, joyously. "You'll stick to that old office until you are a perfect wreck. Why don't you go once a week right through the season? I'll get out all your things to-night, and pack your bag. Of course you must go!"

"Take *us* some time, papa," lisped little Mamie. "We'll all go off together and have a nice picnic."

Ridgedale smiled sadly and nodded. A dreadful emotion possessed him. "My God!" he thought. "I cannot leave them! I cannot do this thing!"

"You must!" silenced his will. "You have decided. Think of what will happen if you do not!"

"I don't know where my appetite has gone; it's poor anyway," observed the man, mastering himself. "I'm going to take a long walk, Ada. Please don't sit up for me."

It was late when he at last sought his bed — the tramp along the country roads had cooled and settled his brain to a stern sense

of the course that must be taken, and his plan had been carefully mapped out. How easily the route to his final action had traced itself in his mind. Surely the finger of Fate was guiding him now, and it must be right. And, strange to say, he slept soundly.

He passed Tuesday as in a dream, mechanically arranging little matters with studied carelessness, to indicate that he surely intended to return to them later. He chatted and joked with his friends and told them of his proposed trip. "I'll send you some trout, old man," he promised Doctor Willey. "What do you say to a day over in Black River next month?"

Yes, the Doctor would go if he could get away, and drove off happy in the thought.

Wednesday he was like a boy in his preparations, laughing and whistling, joking and bragging of the fish he should catch.

"I'm a little crazy, I believe," he mused. "Else I couldn't keep this up. Well, it's the way. No one will possibly suspect."

He did not dare to stop playing his part for a moment. When he kissed Ada and the children good-bye, he was careful to do it hurriedly. "I might make a mistake here," he said to himself. "I'm just going fishing, that's all, that's all," he kept repeating.

On the train he talked pleasantly with strangers, who eyed him with favor and wished they could have an outing and be as happy.

"Why, it's Mr. Ridgedale!" bawled Hercules Budd from the piazza of his small hostelry. "Seems like old times to see you! Come to try the trouts, eh? Wal, there's lots of 'em waitin' fer ye! Step right in!

"Mari! here's Mr. Ridgedale, come down to go fishin'!"

Mrs. Budd greeted Carter with affection. "How be ye? How's yer folks?" she asked. "Ain't ye a bit pale? City air, I guess. Have ham an' eggs fer supper an' some of my creamed pertater ye allus used to be howlin' fer?"

Ridgedale laughed and shook her fat hand. "You know what I want, Mother Budd, don't you? Yes — we are all well. Have some fat on the ham. My! It's good to be here again!"

For a moment he had forgotten his errand. Now a sinking reaction seized him. Alas! how many happy days he had passed among these wild hills, to come back at night tired and hungry to the savory country fare and the sweet, restful evenings.

To-morrow he must start out as in the old bright mornings, and he should not come back. The sun would set, the birds would cease their twittering, and his two good old friends would sit on the vine-clad porch, waiting. But he would not be coming down the mountain road, whistling and yodling.

A vision of a dangling form and a head bobbing gruesomely in the swift current, as the stream pushed and played about it, rose before his eyes, and the sound of falling water was in his ears. Yes, that was the way poor Pete Geer had looked when they found him years ago in that fatal pool where he had slipped and caught his foot in the hook, and the falls had sung and purred his requiem, even as they would be singing over another pitiful figure at the next setting of the sun.

His last night! his — last — night! Was this he? — Carter Ridgedale? — standing in Budd's doorway, staring at the gathering shadows and listening to the brook as it purled and cooed under the old bridge.

"Bah!" he thought, starting. "I swear I won't do it. I'll go fishing once more, and have one good day. Then I'll go home and die like a Christian. I'm demented to think of such a thing."

"Yes, and then?" came the hard afterthought.

Ridgedale shrugged himself. "I'll have one good square meal anyway," he said. "It's worse than going to one's execution — I haven't done it yet — I won't think about it."

Ah man! queer mask that smiles and smirks and twists, to hide the sick and anguished soul within, cheating thy fellows and the passing eye, but not thyself — nor God!

Carter came out on the piazza after his supper and lit his pipe. Budd was expatiating to a man upon the attractions of the vicinity, and beckoned to him.

"Here's a fisherman, Ridgedale!" he exclaimed. "I forgot to tell ye about him. He come yistiddy. Name's Allerton — you fellers want to git acquainted."

The two men shook hands, smiling at the introduction.

"Mr. Allerton's a perfessor of somethin' — I forgit what — don't make no diff'rence. Mr. Ridgedale kin tell ye what I say is true, Perfessor! He see it!"

"Budd was relating a sad occurrence regarding the fate of a

fisherman up on the Gulf Brook some years ago," remarked the stranger, drearily. "Did you witness the finding of the body? I am much interested."

"It's about Pete Geer!" put in the landlord.

"Yes, I was there," answered Carter, huskily. "It was a distressing sight."

"Let's see," observed Allerton, "it is about a mile up the gorge, you said, Budd; quite a fall there by the ruin of an old sawmill; a big beam rests on the bank about four feet above the water and juts out a little way beyond a part of the ruined foundation, right over a deep, swift hole — and there's a great place for trout, eh? Is that it?"

"That's it," replied Hercules, "and right to the eend of the beam is a big pesky tackle hook — used to have a rope an' pulley onto it to haul things up on. That's the critter what done the mischief. It ketched poor Pete's foot or britches, I forgit which, an' hanged him upside down an' drownded him. 'Round here we calls the place Deadman's Hook, an' it ain't fished much now, I tell ye!"

"I should like to see the spot just out of curiosity," said Allerton. "How do you get to it?"

"Oh! jist foller the path goin' up or comin' down. I fish down stream mostly; walk up about two mile and then strike in. The old wood-road runs 'longside. It's a lonesome brook — I don't like it. Where are you going to fish to-morrer, Mr. Ridgedale?"

"Why! I thought I would try the Gulf Brook. I have only a day and I want to catch all I can," responded Carter.

"Goin' to fish up?" asked Allerton, suddenly.

"Yes! I always fish up," was the reply.

"I must write a letter and then go to bed," said the Professor. "Hope you will have good luck, Mr. Ridgedale."

"Thanks! Are you going out to-morrow?"

"I may take a tramp, but I don't think I shall fish much," answered Allerton. "We may meet during the day. Good-night!"

"Queer cuss!" remarked Budd, as the stranger departed. "He's been moonin' 'round all day trying to get started fishin'. I don't believe he's much of a feller at it. He quite chirked up this evenin'."

"Well! I'm going to bed, too, old man, and get a good sleep.

Wake me at five o'clock if I'm not up!" said Carter, with a yawn.

"Hev' ye got to turn in so airly? I thought we'd set up an' visit," replied his host, reproachfully.

"I can't to-night, I'm tired out. To-morrow night, maybe. So long, old man."

"So long, boy!" said Budd.

"He's jist the same," he thought, as Carter went upstairs, "Don't change a mite. What a fine feller he's grown up to be!"

Yes, boys, look back to dear old country days and picture in your minds those hearty friends who in their rough regard have held you close and now in their old age delight to point with pride to your success, as in their loyal hearts they whisper low, "Growed up fine fellers."

And why sneer at the poor half-crazed cheat, sitting on the edge of the feather bed, muttering to himself, "To-morrow night! to-morrow night!" fighting the wearinesss of a dread disease and struggling to be resolute and strong in carrying out the plans of his perverted soul. For only yesterday in meeting him you would have gladly joined the common cry, "Fine fellow!"

Ridgedale took a vial of morphine tablets from his vest pocket and counted out three. "That's enough to make me sleep," he sighed. "If I could only take them all, it would be an easy way, but no! there is no easy way of accidental death."

"Five o'clock!" shouted a well-known voice. "Time to git up, snoozer!"

Where was he? Oh, yes! he knew, and he was going to do it. The day had come and the hour was coming. He would not flinch. His head throbbed painfully and he felt so stupid and sick; he must make an effort to appear bright and cheerful. No one should suspect.

He poured out a big dram of whiskey from his flask and gulped it down. It made the pain in his head worse, but enabled him to progress with more resolution and a deadened sensibility. His breakfast was a mechanical, tasteless operation.

Then he took his tackle — the old rod he had fished with for years, his basket, bait box — all loved companions of his happy days, and walked out into the glare of the brave June sun. It was half-past five. Gazing dizzily at the mountains, he started.

"Hey!" called Mr. Budd, from the barn. "The Perfessor has stole a march on ye. He went up the road half an hour ago."

Carter nodded at him stupidly and tried to smile. "He will feel bad," he choked. "Go on, fool!" he added, "don't think — go on!"

Out of sight, up the wood-road, he jointed his rod and arranged every little detail, even to baiting his hook. "I must get there first," he muttered. "If Allerton tramps around, he may spoil everything."

Raising his flask to his lips he took another long drink. "I'll need it," he said, fiercely. "It's got to be done."

He almost ran up the rough path. The forest was fragrant with a thousand delicate scents, that indescribable odor of the woods. The birds sang a chorus of happy good-mornings, but the man who always stopped to breathe in the freshness of the mountain and to listen to the music from the feathered throats plunged on unheeding.

Not for him now were the brightness and bird-songs, the ferns and the delicate leaves of the sprays. His thoughts were bent on a rough beam, where his eyes should grow dizzy and his foot slip. Ah! he could see part of it now; he must leave the path here and pick his way across the rocks where the blackberry vines tangled, then down, then out on the plank — then —

Was that some one crawling through the bushes — a man with a white, set face, creeping, creeping toward the stone where the beam lay? Where had he seen that face, with the gray moustache and imperial? Surely, it was his friend of the night before, but what was he doing?

Ridgedale started a little to get a better view; the big rock shut off the sight of the man now, and the beam too. He slipped and fell heavily, and the next moment the eyes of Professor Allerton were angrily glaring into his.

Carter rose slowly to his feet, his eyes hard, stony, staring. His companion fell back a step, moistening his lips with his tongue, and glancing guiltily from side to side. Each had read in the other's face the hideous secret of his soul! Naked, bare, shorn of all mitigating circumstances, the truth stood forth as plainly as if written in letters of fire upon their blanched brows.

Silently Ridgedale held out his flask, and Allerton grasped it eagerly, and swallowed great gulps of the grateful stimulant, then returned it and watched, almost jealously, the fierce working of the other's throat as he drained the remainder.

Not a word had been uttered, and now the two, as if by a mutual impulse, moved from the screen of the boulder, and stared as if fascinated at the long, heavy plank jutting out over the gurgling water, the great rusty hook imbedded in its end, like the crooked finger of an evil, beckoning Fate.

Slowly the hands of the men stole out and clasped, as if for protection from some direful menace, and so they stood and gazed.

"Let us sit down," said the Professor, at last. "We understand each other, my dear fellow. We have both been saved from a terrible crime."

Carter nodded, still staring at the beam, and they selected a flat rock in the shade.

"This is a most extraordinary happening!" observed Professor Allerton. "I think we had better be perfectly frank with each other. Why should you, if you are willing to tell me, desire to put an end to your life — a young man and apparently in good health, and certainly in your right mind?"

Carter told him briefly his inevitable end and the reasons for his action.

"And you have a wife and children and resolved on this course for their supposed benefit?"

Ridgedale nodded. "Why not!" he exclaimed. "It seems to me yet sensible and best all around."

"You can be cured, I think," said the other; "your trouble is not as hopeless as many physicians think. I am a chemist by profession, but have made a thorough study of this subject. Ten years ago my symptoms were precisely similar to yours. I was given to understand by excellent advisers that my case was hopeless. I would not give up. I experimented, discovered a remedy, cured myself, and am to-day physically sound and well. I am confident that a cure can be effected in your case."

The younger man stared. "I cannot believe it!" he said.

"I shall prove it," responded his companion. "If I can save a life, I have, after all, something to live for."

A great hope sprang up in Carter's heart. "Tell me, tell me of this remedy," he cried eagerly.

"There is plenty of time," answered the Professor, smiling; "meanwhile, you may believe and trust me, even if a few minutes ago I was at the point of self-destruction. I cannot quite account for my own action," he went on; "it was an impulse that overcame me, or rather I welcomed it. I was rejoiced to feel that I could desire to take my life. The story of this spot had made quite an impression upon me — I wished to see it, and alone. Arriving, it seemed so natural and easy a way of ending my lonely existence that I hailed the thought as a message from the Fates. You have everything to live for — and to hope for — my friend. I have nothing to live for, nor to hope for, except, now, your recovery. Within two years death has robbed me of a beloved wife and my two children. I am but a lonely, heart-broken man. Death would have been welcome. Let us get away from this accursed place," he added, rising from the stone on which they had been seated.

"Our folks is home airly, Mari!" observed Mr. Budd, as the two guests strolled into the yard. "The trouts ain't bitin', I guess. Too bright, maybe. Lucky I bought a good mess of that boy, so's Carter will hev some to carry home to his fam'ly."

"He an' thet Perfessor man seems mighty thick fer only knowin' each other less'n a day," replied his wife; "see 'em smilin' an' lockin' arms. Must hev had fun up on the brook. Guess they didn't go nowheres near Deadman's Hook, or they wouldn't be so cheerful."

"They're two awful fine fellers, *I* think," said Hercules, watching them. "Carter, 'specially."

Ridgedale's law practice is increasing rapidly, and he is noted for his careful habits and excellent health. A tall, slender man, with a gray moustache and imperial, said to be a scientist of note, makes his home with the Ridgedales when not travelling, and the children call him Uncle Allerton.

A Brilliant Coincidence.*

BY ANNE RANKIN OSBORNE.

THE sun cannot always remain behind a cloud. There is bound to come a day, even in the dullest climes, when the clouds will have exhausted their powers to weep, and cannot help but let the light of heaven through.

Mrs. Montgomery Spranglin was just emerging into the sunlight of life after the dark days of first widowhood. She was attractive and had lost none of her heaven-born joyous nature, despite the submergence. Furthermore, she was pretty enough to win admiration for herself alone, regardless of what the Spranglin estate might stand for.

To the credit of Mr. Jonas Beverly, be it said, he knew nothing of the estate, and loved Mrs. Spranglin without question.

They were going out to a musical at the home of a friend. She had not yet drawn on her gloves, and at a turn of the stairway she threw back her left arm to gather her skirts, and struck her hand forcibly on the stair-rail.

"Oh!" she gasped, "how I hurt my hand!"

He caught the fingers, kissed them, and they passed out, laughing. Seated in the carriage, she put on her gloves as she chatted, and the offending hand was thought of no more.

Two hours later, as they stood before the low fire in her own drawing room discussing the evening's entertainment, as men and women do, she suddenly held out her hand, exclaiming in dismay: "See! the stone from my ring is gone!"

He took her gloves, examined the fingers, helped her shake out the folds of her gown, searched the carpet about their feet, and then said:

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"I know! You loosened the stone when you struck your hand against the railing, and it is in the hall."

The hall was inspected and minutely gone over, inch by inch, to no avail.

"And yet it must have fallen just here," he said disconsolately. Seeing Mrs. Spranglin on the verge of tears, he seized his hat, saying, "I'll find the cab. Perhaps it's there. I'll come back."

"No, not to-night," she answered mournfully. "Let me know in the morning. I may find it here by the light of day."

Her voice was full of suppressed tears and he escaped the sobs which followed his departure, and the piteous caressing words bestowed upon the poor gaping circlet on her finger.

On the morrow, Mr. Beverly was early at the house with the sad report of no success, but the reassuring conviction that the loss occurred in the hall and that sooner or later the stone would be restored.

It seemed that no one had come through the hall during their absence, although there was mud on the carpet, and the front door was left unlatched. Other members of the family were in the house, but all had been occupied that particular evening in their rooms and were sure no one had entered.

"Does it matter so very much?" asked Mr. Beverly, toying with the dismantled ring as he held her hand a moment. "I know it was a handsome stone —"

"It was my engagement ring," she said with lowered eyes and sadly.

He hesitated a moment and then cried impulsively, "May I not replace it? Will you not value another as you did this?"

She drew her hand hastily away and answered with frightened eyes:

"There is ill luck in such a loss. I can never accept another until this is found. Oh, it isn't the value of the diamond; of course the ring could be reset, but there's something so horrible about losing one's engagement ring! Shall I tell you my secret? There was a bit of jealousy in my husband's fond heart and — and that ring was a talisman. Could you know the sacred words and the half-laughing threat with which it was placed on my finger, you would understand. No, no, it must be found or I shall

never be quite happy, and surely I shall never allow it to be replaced."

She did not intend to be dramatic. The superstitious terror which possessed her was depicted on her face, while another sentiment struggled for freedom and showed itself vaguely to him. She held out her hand sorrowfully.

"Isn't it strange?" said he. "This is the second time I have registered a vow to find a missing diamond — a lost wedding ring! Some years ago my mother had the ring my father gave her at the altar stolen. I have spent every endeavor and many dollars tracing that stone — unsuccessfully. I shall not rest until I find yours."

He was gone, and Mrs. Spranglin was left to reflect on the circumstance, and dimly to imagine another ring on the third finger of her left hand, but the instant this new thought touched her brain, there was a reeling sensation and a terrible burning behind her eyes. She threw out her hands as if for support and there, in the vacant setting, tiny blue flames leaped and played, dazzling her. With a cry, she pressed her finger on it, thinking wildly that the loss was a delusion or a dream, but the jagged prongs held nothing and hurt her. Mechanically she repeated the fierce words her husband had once uttered and which she had only to listen to hear again at any moment, so deeply were they graven on her memory. With thoughts so concentrated, the mania ceased.

Several days she spent in her room, wrapped in a cloak of ungovernable misery. If, for a moment, her heart pulsed with the uncertain new thing that was growing there, she was tormented with the demon in her brain which flashed through her aching eyes and reflected on her finger, causing the very gold of the ring to seem hot. She took the poor trinket and hid it away, but there was no peace until it was back in its accustomed place, and the now terrible threat repeated. It seemed incomprehensible to her that she had once dwelt smilingly, while she shuddered, on those words. Now they were haunting her with fiery trail, and in them somehow she recognized the existence of a discord in the music of her married life, a jarring string which snapped ere it twanged.

She did not see Mr. Beverly during these harrowing days of fruitless search and dread, unnatural self-communings. Indeed,

she could not guess as to time and would not listen with patience to the advice and solicitude of her family.

Then there came a little note, type-written and evidently dictated — perhaps by telephone, because it was unsigned except by the letters "J. B." in type.

"I do not dare see you. I am nursing a poor boy with fever. May be malignant."

Now a wonderful thing happened to Mrs. Spranglin. The old misery fell away as a senseless garment. Here was an unconscious antidote — a human sorrow and a womanly sympathy. She forgot all else save the poor suffering boy and the brave man who was doing what perhaps no one else would do. There was work in the world for her. There was a need. Superstition plays no part in the real things of life. She did not wait to argue with her old self. Her brain simply followed her footsteps.

Her first efforts at locating Mr. Beverly were frustrated, but by and by she found him in a tumble-down shanty on the river front. The boy was better — was out of danger — the mother said, and Mr. Beverly was sleeping on a cot in the next room. She must not come in. But Mrs. Spranglin quietly took her place by the woman's side, doing what she could.

"I will tidy the room a bit," apologized the weary mother. "Here are Johnnie's shoes in the corner, all muddy, just as he took them off that night he was taken so violent." She gathered up the shoes, together with a few stray garments, and went out into the other room. As she did so, a great flake of dried mud fell from the sole of one of the shoes, and Mrs. Spranglin caught the glint of something shining. At that moment Mr. Beverly, aroused by the woman passing about, cautiously entered the sick-room.

"Mr. Beverly! See here! Isn't this my stone?" cried Mrs. Spranglin in suppressed tones.

"Or mine," he said tartly, taking her by the shoulders and leading her into the open air. "How dare you come into this infected place? I will investigate the diamond. Hurry home and take every precaution for your health. My God, Martha, this is yellow fever!"

She hurried away as she was bid, not daring do otherwise than obey that stern voice of command. Wonder at her marvel-

ous find was dimmed by an awful anxiety for him in that dreadful place, and an unconscious exultation born of the sound of her name on his lips. She analyzed nothing and was at peace.

He was in danger and she loved him! What cared she now for the missing ring? Had she ever cared? But perhaps it was found. Yes, that was the solution of the problem. No flames flickered in the open setting or in her brain. The spell was broken. The menace was hers no longer. But how came her diamond clinging to the shoe of that poor boy?

She went direct to her physician, not for herself, but to secure attention for Mr. Beverly and the boy. From time to time she learned that all was well, that the boy had recovered and that Mr. Beverly was taking a much-needed rest under careful medical attention in quarantine. In due time he came.

"Mrs. Spranglin — Martha — I have a strange tale to tell. I have your stone and my mother's. That poor woman in whose cottage you found me was my laundress. I had never seen her and knew nothing of her circumstances. Her son, the boy whom you saw lying sick, always came for my clothes and returned them. On the night you lost your diamond, her child, a little girl, was dying and she sent to me for aid in the way of advance in money. He learned at my rooms that I was here and, while we were out, he came into the hall — he is ignorant in such matters — and knocked. Receiving no answer, he went away home and, himself, became violently ill. The next day, after I left you, I found that the woman had again sent to me. I went to the address left with my servant, and found what you know — awful distress and no one to bring relief. I stayed with her and nursed her boy back to life. You found the diamond in the mud from his shoes — that is explained. Well, to-day I took the stone to Wilson's to have it examined and, if possible, identified. I have the history of this brilliant trouble-creator as learned from his books. He unqualifiedly identifies it as the very rare steel-blue diamond which he reset in its old-fashioned frame of beaten gold, when it became loosened at one time, for Mrs. James Beverly — my mother. He showed me the date. There is also another date, which perhaps you may be able to corroborate, upon which this same stone was taken from the old setting and placed in a new one, by order of

Mr. Montgomery Spranglin — a date just before your marriage, I think. That your husband acquired the ring honestly there can be no doubt. It had been stolen and sold to a dealer. Wilson did not know this at the time. The beauty of the stone attracted the admiration of Mr. Spranglin, and he purchased it for you."

"Yes," she replied in opened-eyed astonishment. "The date is the same, and he told me the stone was taken from an old setting. But he said it had belonged to a mighty magician who had caused the stone to become charged with the personality of the giver to such a degree that so long as I wore it I could never be separated from him, and if I parted with it for any reason, I would never again be at peace. I loved him and did not realize the depths of superstition in which he plunged my sensitive nature when he said, 'This stone is a part of my being. Its light is my eye. If I die it lives. If ever it is removed from the hand where I now place it, its fire will unite with my spirit to haunt you. Remember.'"

Jonas Beverly detected the calm curl of the lip as she repeated the foolish words which had so tortured her. Turning the beautiful bit so that it would catch the light, he said:

"It is indeed a gem among gems. What a pity it should have been so maligned. I have taken it to my mother, Martha. She kissed it and sends it to you." He opened the palm of the hand he held and placed the stone there.

Martha lifted it reverently to her lips and laid it back in his hand with a little smile.

"Shall I have it set again for you, and dedicated anew?" he whispered.

"Yes," she answered, "in an old-fashioned setting. I will wear it for you and for her. And, Jo, remember the Spranglin estate goes where there's the greatest need for poor boys."

Made to Order.*

BY ROBERT WHITAKER.

ONCE fairly inside the room, he straightened up and stood in breathless silence, listening with every sense on the alert. There was no sound except the throbbing of his own heart, which beat so loudly that it added to his nervousness. He was tempted, even yet, to go back. But the job had proven so easy thus far, and the field seemed to be so clear before him, it looked like the height of unreason for him to falter just when success was in his grasp. Besides, he had crossed the Rubicon, and was a criminal now. He shuddered at the word. Yet he fortified his failing courage with it. He had broken into a strange house in the night, where were two defenceless women, with the intent of robbing them of such part of their wealth as he could seize. If he were caught the law would certainly regard him as a burglar, and justly so. If he retreated he would still be a criminal, and also a coward. Then, he must have the money, or else — He shivered again, at the thought of the alternative. He would do nothing more than scare the women, if that much were necessary. If he could get the money without disturbing them, so much the better.

The moonlight flooded the room, making it no difficult matter for him to get his bearings. He swept in at a glance the comfort and elegance of the apartment. He stood in a private parlor, with a chamber, whose door was slightly open, to the right, and on the other side a bath and toilet room. The door in front of him, he judged, led directly into the hall. He walked quickly, but softly, across the room, and tried the knob with careful hand. The door

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* The writer of this story received a cash prize of $100 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending February 26, 1902.

was locked. Perhaps he could find access to the hall through the bedroom. He turned about, and his heart stood still as he looked at the window through which he had come. It was covered from top to bottom with a close network of iron bars. Or was it an illusion of the moonlight? He hurried across, forgetful of stealthiness now. The bars were real, and seemed as solid as if they were part of the brick walls. He tried the chamber, but found that there also the door was locked, and the windows solidly barred on the inside. The bathroom was equally hopeless as a way of escape. He was too bewildered to think of picking the lock of one of the doors leading into the hall. How could the window have been barred behind him, without a sound? However done, it was certainly a neat trap.

He sat down to wait the appearance of his captors, expecting every minute the entrance of the police. There was no sound in the house. Half an hour passed, and it seemed to him, in the turmoil of his thoughts and the intensity of his anxiety, half an eternity. There was the same dead silence. Perhaps the trap had worked so quietly that they did not know he was caught. He might yet escape. His hand rubbed against the keys which were in his pocket. He tried one on the door of the parlor. It was too large. He tried another. This also was too large. The third went in. The lock turned. His heart throbbed with hope, and he grew almost dizzy with the sense of relief. It was only for an instant. The door was fastened on the other side. Again he tried the door of the bedroom. The same key fitted it, with the same result. He might dig his way out. But a very brief examination of the windows and the walls convinced him that with any tools at his command it would be a work of days, not of hours. And they would certainly find him in the morning.

Then, with a grim laugh at his situation, after he had carefully examined each room again, and searched even the empty closet for some way of escape, he went to bed. He was cold, and sick at heart, and felt himself succumbing to the reaction which naturally followed the nervous strain under which he had labored ever since this unlucky project had seized upon him. If they came for him that night they might as well find him in bed and asleep, as shivering there with nervous collapse. And he would be better

prepared to meet the morning with some measure of courage if he could get a little rest and sleep. Ah, but the bed was luxurious! So much the better. He would find the prison cot hard enough the next night. And then, in spite of excitement and dread, he fell asleep.

When he waked in the morning, daylight filled the room. He knew at once it was late. He knew a moment afterward by the bars against the window where he was. It was odd that he had been allowed to rest so long. And then, as he reached up to where he had hung his clothes, a greater surprise fell upon him. His clothes were gone. The hooks themselves were gone. He jumped out and looked around the room hurriedly. Why, there they were, on the other side of the bed! But he was positive that he had hung them between the bed and the window. Yet there they were, in plain sight. But they were not the same clothes. He had worn a dingy brown suit. These were a soft dark gray. His own clothes were faded and threadbare. These were quite new. The underwear, too, was of finer texture and of another make from any that he had worn. And his hat and shoes were missing. In place of his shoes stood a pair of trim, comfortable slippers. There was nothing at all in the way of a covering for his head.

He put the clothes on, as one might dress in a dream. Indeed, he was not sure that he was really awake. Perhaps the very thought of the robbery was only a nightmare. If it only were! But there was the tumbled bed, from which he had just risen. And there, in the doorway between the two rooms, was the black mask which he had dropped in his confusion the night before. And as he stooped to pick it up he saw on the opposite side of the little parlor a breakfast table, daintily set. The dishes were covered, but proved to be yet warm. Who could have placed them there? And who had made the exchange of his clothes? The clothes, he reasoned, might have been changed in the night while he slept. But the breakfast could not have been there, at the most, to exceed half an hour.

He ate a little timidly, though he felt that so many attentions could hardly portend any evil purpose against him. He was in a rather reckless mood anyway, and did not much care whether the

food was drugged or not. But he felt no ill effects from it. He wondered that his captors could trust him with knife and fork, and found himself planning how he might use them to dig his way out. This led him to examine the barred windows once again in the clearer light of the morning. The result was to deepen his sense of the hopelessness of escape. Whoever had planned the trap had planned it to perfection. There was no way out except by the door. And the door, he knew, was fastened on the other side. Yet as he turned about he saw that the table and the dishes were gone. Had the door opened while his back was turned? He tried it, but found it just as unyielding as before. And he noticed now certain spider threads near the top which seemed to indicate that it could not have been opened for some time. But how had the table disappeared? Was he in a haunted house? Or were these women some sort of spiritualistic mediums who were enjoying themselves at his expense?

He passed a restless day, pacing up and down his comfortably furnished cage with little regard for its luxuries. His dinner appeared and disappeared as quietly and mysteriously as the breakfast table had come and gone. When he returned to his chamber a little while afterward he found that the bed had been put in order while he ate. Here was certainly a full measure of mysteries. He began to seriously wonder if the house were possessed.

The mystery of the disappearing table was explained that evening. He was on the watch as the supper hour drew near. His eyes grew weary by reason of his steady gaze upon the door. As he glanced aside an instant to rest them he saw the floor open, and a moment later the top of the table came in sight. The movement was practically noiseless, even when the table, having risen to a proper height, stopped as mysteriously as it had risen into view. When the table was in place the aperture under it was sealed so completely that it required careful examination to see where the break in the floor occurred. As soon as his meal was finished, and before he had time to put himself altogether on guard the table began to sink. He leaned over as the top of the table sank below the level of the floor, hoping that he might get some glimpse of how the marvel was worked, but he saw only the closed

sides of a shaft into which the table glided as into a box. As soon as the height of the dishes would allow, the floor glided softly into place from either side. He was too much astonished to make any motion, and the floor was so quickly and perfectly replaced that he could hardly persuade himself that the thing had happened at all.

He had been so busily occupied with the mysteriousness of his situation that the circumstances which had driven him to his attempted crime had quite slipped his mind. But the long, quiet evening recalled them, and his thoughts concerning the revelations which must follow his unexplained disappearance, together with his perplexity as to the strange imprisonment which had befallen him, kept him tossing on the comfortable bed for many an hour before he was able to forget himself in sleep.

He found his clothes in place the next morning, but discovered in one of the pockets of the vest a lady's watch, which he was sure had not been there the day before. He had missed his own timepiece a good deal, although it was of very little value, and quite unreliable as a timekeeper. This was a dainty affair, the case of gold, and the movement one of the best.

He made one other discovery which gave him much less pleasure than the watch. This was a copy of the morning paper, lying on the shelf just above where his clothes hung. It was folded inside out, and the first item that he saw was a marked article, at the head of which was a fairly good likeness of himself. The article recited in the usual manner that Walter Sherman, for three years past in the employ of Callings, Weller & Co., had suddenly disappeared, and that the funds of the firm were five hundred dollars short on his account. The police had ascertained that the young man had been gambling a little, and it was supposed that he had lost the money at the table. He had left his boarding house on the evening of the fourth and not a trace of him had been found since then. His employers believed that he had fled to avoid disgrace, and were satisfied that he had taken very little, if any, money with him.

His face burned as he read the story, and his breakfast came and went untasted. Then these mysterious people knew who he was, and from this article they had learned both the motive which led

him to seek to rob them, and the kind of life he had been living for the last few months.

But why had they not turned him over at once to the police? Were they keeping him there to torture him with long uncertainty? Did they intend to torment him from day to day by continual reminders of his weakness, and wickedness, and helplessness in their hands? Why, then, had they so studied his comfort and convenience? What meant the new suit of clothes? Why such generous provision for his meals? Why had they sent him, on this particular morning, in company with the condemning paper, so costly and beautiful a timepiece? And why a lady's timepiece to take the place of his own?

His head ached with the effort to solve these mysteries. He bowed his face in his hands, and sat unmoving for a long time. When he did raise his head there were traces of tears in his eyes, the first that he had shed for years. Yet he could not have told why he had shed them. He knew that he was heartily ashamed of himself, and utterly discouraged by the miserable shipwreck which he had made.

The table was there again. The untasted breakfast dishes had been removed. In their place were a dish of choice fruit and a book. The book was "Les Misérables." He had heard of the great romance, but had never read it. The title attracted him now. Miserable he thought he could have recognized in any language. But why had this book been chosen? Was it because of the title? Or had the book itself some message for him? He ate of the fruit sparingly, not because he desired it just then, but because he could not altogether refuse the kindness. And then he took the book over to the window and looked it through from end to end. A name had been written on the fly leaf, and lately erased. Some bits of the rubber still clung to the page. But the name had been thoroughly rubbed out.

He spent the day alternately wondering and reading. His windows overlooked an enclosed yard. He remembered climbing the fence on the night of the attempted burglary, after he had carefully reconnoitered the house. He had wondered then why the yard was so thoroughly enclosed. Because of the fence he had not thought it so strange to find the window above the porch unfastened.

They evidently thought the fence sufficient security on that side of the house. He wondered now if possibly there were children in the house, and if the yard were for them. He had satisfied himself before his venture that the two women were alone. But if so why this high, tight board fence? Was this yard their recreation ground? Why such seclusion from the public? And what part did this magic room in which he found himself ordinarily play in their solitary lives?

Some of these questions seemed to be answered by the appearance, about the middle of the afternoon, of the two women in the yard below. They were both heavily veiled, and soon passed out of sight among the trees. An hour later they returned, their faces covered, and without so much as a glance in his direction entered the house. They were dressed alike, and were of nearly the same size. What their ages might be it was impossible to guess with any degree of assurance, but he was quite sure that one was a young woman by her more erect and vigorous walk.

The next day he felt better, and ate his meals as usual. He even meditated an attempt to descend with the table, and solve some of the mysteries by force. But he discovered that in some secret way his movements were known. Otherwise he could not account for the fact that while any article was missing from the table it would not descend. Nor did it ever tarry long after he was through eating and his napkin was in place. He made a close examination of the floor beside his bed and satisfied himself that the bed descended and was raised like the table. But he found that the door of the bedroom was locked, once when he essayed to go in, at which time the bed was evidently set in order. One afternoon he was quite certain that he heard some one moving in the room, and he knew afterwards that the chamber had been carefully dusted throughout. That night he retired early, and was soon aware that some one was in the parlor. But when he tried to peer out cautiously he found that this time he was locked in the chamber. Yet there was no key in the door, and no sound of the turning of the lock.

So matters went with him for a week, with no change in his outward circumstances. But the book had taken great hold upon him. He clutched at the story of Jean Valjean as a drowning man

at a rope. And though he went down into depths of despair as the days went by and no word came to him from any living creature, and the mystery of his strange imprisonment deepened about him, he felt that the book had been given him as an assurance that he might yet have the chance to redeem himself, and his wrecked reputation. Hope beat high in his heart on the eighth day, when again the morning paper appeared, this time with the information that some friend of Walter Sherman had settled the sum of his indebtedness to Callings, Weller & Co., without giving any name, and the search for him had been abandoned. He thought he understood now why he had been detained, and confidently expected his release as soon as the excitement concerning him had blown over. He half anticipated being transported in some strange fashion to distant parts, and went to bed each night for a week or two with a suspicion that he might wake in some unfamiliar city. For he judged from the fact that whenever the women walked in his sight they were closely covered that they were determined not to be known to him. And therefore he was sure that when released he would in some way be put beyond the reach of their acquaintance. This made him only the more anxious to know them, for he could not doubt that these women, against whom he had attempted a contemptible crime, had not only suffered him to escape a term in the penitentiary, but had themselves paid the amount of his stealings from his employers. And, besides, they had given him a message of hope which he could never forget. He marvelled at their ingenuity as much as he admired their modesty, while he waited with all the patience of a now thoroughly grateful man for his release.

But his release did not come. He found another book upon his table. It was a less famous story, but had in it the same note of manliness and strength. The next day brought some volumes of history. Then followed one or two books of verse. Within a week he had a small library of the best literature in his room. But the presence of so many books disturbed him more than any of them entertained him. Here were books enough to last a year. They could not mean to keep him cooped up for their entertainment like a bird in a cage. If he was really to redeem himself he must have a larger field than these three rooms. And, besides,

the loneliness of his life and the want of exercise were telling upon him. He began to feel rebellious and to plot again for forcing some way of escape.

Just then an odd thing happened. The younger of the two women, as he thought, appeared one afternoon, not in the usual black like her companion, but in a soft, dark gray, which he recognized at once as being, so far as color and material were concerned, the exact counterpart of the suit which he wore. She paid no more attention to him than before, although he felt that this time she was conscious of his presence at the window. The next morning he found a dressing gown hanging upon one of the hooks beside his clothes. It was a very beautiful piece of work, in which red was the prevailing color. That afternoon the younger woman wore a wrap over her gray dress which was almost a duplicate of his dressing robe.

He was both vexed and amused. What did it mean? Was the girl trying to flirt with him? Or was she playing with him, as a cat does with a mouse? Perhaps she would send him up some of her dresses to wear later. He laughed bitterly to think how completely he was in her power. Yet the books did not read like literature provided by an unbalanced or an unprincipled woman. He had noticed that many of the books were marked. The markings were sensible and suggestive, neither preachy nor sentimental. His old perplexity returned with redoubled force.

So things went with him for two months. It was early summer now. He found flowers often on his table. Other flowers just like them the young woman wore in her afternoon walks. The question of exercise had been solved, without his being able to enter any complaint. He had tried once to speak through the door when he thought some one was in the chamber, but his voice echoed so oddly in the room that he could not distinguish the words himself. There was no response from the other side of the door. But one day he found in the closet a miniature gymnasium. The walls had been fitted up with chest weights, and other contrivances for indoor exercise. There was a small book on manual training. On the fly leaf, in a pretty feminine hand, was written his name. The gymnasium seemed to add to the probability which the increase of his library suggested, that the time of his release

was yet quite distant. Yet he could not imagine why they were keeping him there, or fix in his own mind any limit to the term which they had fixed for his imprisonment.

The summer waned and went with no relief. There was only one change in his situation. Every afternoon now some one sang in the room below. It was a girl's voice, not very strong, but very rich and sweet. He knew it must be the younger of the two women who sang. The music was quite varied, but in the main very simple. Sometimes she sang, for a whole afternoon, only the old hymns which he had known and loved in his boyhood days. It seemed to him that his mother sang her lullabies again. Then the songs were light and frolicsome, as if they were playmates, and she were laughing with him. Anon she sang of battle and of strife, and her music stirred him like the beat of a drum. But, somehow, she always seemed to sing for him. And then she would appear in the garden, wearing something that was the counterpart of something which he wore, or with flowers upon her bosom like the flowers in his room.

He thought all manner of strange thoughts in those long months. It seemed so absurd that he should be cribbed up in this crazy sort of a way, and courted, if it was courting, as never man was courted before. He would have written her some message, but nothing in the shape of pen or pencil was ever provided him. He tried once to print something in one of the books, with a pin which he found, but no attention was paid to it. He planned several ingenious escapes, but they were all anticipated, and somehow he felt ashamed of his efforts, because of some added kindness which followed. And so he read and read, and wondered more than he read, while the summer gave way to fall, and the fall to an early winter. His room was comfortably warmed and ventilated in ways not altogether clear to him. The women walked in the garden less now, but the songs continued every day. His beard grew long and silky, for no razor had been provided him, perhaps for fear that he might do himself harm. He grew a little fleshier, but since taking up his exercise he had regained a good deal of his wonted strength. And in spite of many periods of impatience, and a good deal of intermittent aggravation, the joy and strength and peace of her songs and the calm of his deep solitude

were borne in upon his soul, so that he came to feel in him reserves of manhood which he had never realized before.

And then, one morning, just a year from the night of his fateful adventure, he found a fresh change of clothes throughout. This time there were provided hat and shoes and outer coat. Some of the things he had carried in his pockets the night he entered the house had been restored. But the little gold watch still replaced his own. He ate his breakfast with a good deal of nervous excitement, anticipating some marked change in his position, and wondering what it would be. He glanced up at the window, and lo, the bars were gone. He went out as he had come in, but with less secretiveness of manner. A ladder reached from the porch to the ground. At the foot of the ladder he turned to seek the door. He would make frank confession, and acknowledgment of their kindness before he went away. No one answered his repeated knocks. While he stood there hesitating a gate in the fence swung open silently, and seemed to beckon him forth. He went out and the gate closed behind him, with a click which told him it was locked. He went around the house, and tried the door on the other side. It looked as if it had not been opened for years. There was no answer. The windows showed only closed shutters. He knocked again, with the same poor success. And then, with many a backward glance, he went away.

The Delegates from Dulverton.*

BY DE GREY C. FOGG.

HE President, aware of a becoming new bonnet and fresh gloves, swept serenely to the rostrum and rapped with her little gavel. The meeting came to order. The Secretary patted her back hair, adjusted a comb, settled her gold-rimmed eyeglasses firmly on her nose and rose to read the records of the last meeting. She was still reading when the door at the back of the hall opened softly and three ladies entered who were not members of the club. One of them sank modestly into the nearest seat, but the other two came down the main aisle as quietly as possible and took their places on the front settee.

"The delegates from Dulverton," thought the President, faintly inclining her head in welcome and smiling her sweetest. "I'd about given them up, but I suppose their car was late. The tall one in black must be Mrs. Smythe; I've heard she was a very handsome woman, but I rather fancied her a blonde; I'd no idea she was such a thunder-and-lightning type as that. What eyes, and what a chin!"

The Hentley Woman's Club had already exchanged courtesies by correspondence with the recently organized Woman's Club of Dulverton, a smaller town some dozen miles away, and the Dulverton ladies in response to a cordial invitation to visit at any time had replied that they would be glad to send a little delegation to the next Home Talent meeting of their more experienced neighbor, to gather such hints and suggestions as might be useful for their own work. This was the meeting at which they were expected, and it was understood that their President, Mrs. Smythe, with their Secretary and the Chairman of the Committee on Literature, would constitute the delegation. Already the Hentley ladies

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had become aware of their presence, or at least of that of two of them, and were interestedly surveying the napes of their necks, the set of their coats, and the arrangement of the trimming at the rear of their headgear. Mrs. Smythe wore a large plumed hat which was elegant and correct, if it *did* extinguish their own President from the eyes of half her club; but the shapeless pink bonnet, decorated with parrot-green chenille, a purple pompon, and a bunch of large artificial cherries, which perched at a rakish angle above the somewhat peculiar coiffure of the second delegate was silently pronounced by half a hundred critics to be, not merely dowdy, but of a hideousness quite extraordinary. It looked as if it might have been fished out of her great-grandmother's forgotten bandbox! But many of them reflected charitably that Dulverton had only been connected with the outer world since the trolley was run through last summer, and no doubt was still little better than the backwoods in its innocence of fashions. There might be an untrained but noble intellect beneath that rainbow of millinery.

The door at the back of the hall opened gently again, and two more women — strangers — slipped in. A grunt or groan, anguished and distinctly audible, proceeded from the Dulverton lady who had remained at the rear of the room as they sat down beside her. Many heads were turned at the sound — but there was no further disturbance and opinion was divided as to whether some one had broken her glasses, or seen a mouse, or accidently jabbed somebody else with a hatpin. The Secretary's record was accepted, and the Chairman of the Committee on Purchasing an Encyclopedia rose to report.

It was then that a small, hastily scribbled note, started from the last settee with the request to "please pass it along," began to work its way from hand to hand down the hall. It was addressed "*The Secretary or President*," and the Secretary read it first. Her eyeglasses dropped and her mouth opened. Then she left her little table and tiptoed to the President, who leaned down over the desk and consulted with her. Their conversation was not long, though it seemed earnest, and presently the Secretary resumed her place, and the President sat back in her chair and fanned herself. A solicitous member, with

whom fresh air was a hobby, thought she looked pale and was getting faint, and hastily opened the nearest window — for which service she received the unthankful glare of all the women on that side of the hall, who pulled up their wraps and shivered ostentatiously, until another member, with her face set in lines of heroic determination, got firmly up and shut it again. During this little episode the note was forgotten, and the Committee's report was concluded and adopted.

Then the chosen subject of the afternoon was presented by the member in charge of the programme, who made a bright but brief introductory speech and resumed her seat, leaving the field open for debate. The black plumed hat on the front seat soared slowly into universal attention, as the tall figure beneath it rose, straightened to its full height, and claimed the floor: "Madam President — "

"Mrs. Smythe," said the President, rising and bowing toward the speaker.

"Madam President, I do not know whether the custom of this assembly permits a stranger to take part in its discussions — "

The President smiled and her lips formed, "Certainly." She poured a glass of water from the pitcher at her elbow and drank it. Mrs. Smythe, once on her feet and favorably launched, proceeded fluently with her speech. Her voice was rich, winning and varied, her English unimpeachable, her ideas occasionally startling but always original and interesting, her person commanding, her pose graceful, her gestures effective. She had half turned to face her hearers, and they listened with all their ears and gazed with all their eyes. Never had such a speech been delivered before the Woman's Club of Hentley! As she paused a moment — dramatically and to catch her breath — the audience broke spontaneously into applause.

From the back of the hall at the same moment a harsh and husky female voice remarked loudly, "'Ear! 'Ear!"

There was a slight stir, and many of the ladies looked around in surprise, but Mrs. Burbidge, whose piercing whisper always carried half around the room, saved the moment from awkwardness by commenting audibly, "The third delegate. She must be English. How quaint!"

Mrs. Smythe resumed her speech. It was very brilliant, but it was certainly very long. Most of the audience remained still under the charm, but a minority, including especially the other members who were prepared to speak, began to be uneasy. A few openly fidgeted, and cast reproachful glances from the clock to the President. There was no specified time-limit in the club — there had never been need of one — but this was too bad! It was very well for a visitor to share the discussion, but to monopolize it was another thing.

Another dramatic pause arrived, and again the pat of approving gloves, and the hoarse, "'Ear! 'Ear!" from the unknown Englishwoman. Then again Mrs. Smythe resumed her melodious outpourings. She spoke more and more picturesquely, more and more rapidly, more and more brilliantly, as she swept superbly to the climax of her peroration. But scarcely had the applause which followed it died away than she came to her feet again, and moved that the discussion be closed for the present session, and further consideration of the subject deferred until the next meeting. That was altogether too much! Half a dozen members were on their feet, pointing out that it was not in order for a person not a member of the club to offer a motion. To their unbounded amazement, the Chair ruled against them. There was a gasp and a murmur of protest. An irate little, plump butter-ball woman (one of the President's intimate friends) bounced to her feet exclaiming explosively, "I appeal against the decision of the Chair!"

"The Chair," said the President, "will entertain no appeal"; and she put the motion.

It was defeated of course — vigorously, ringingly, unanimously defeated, although Mrs. Smythe (who had no vote) gave her voice resonantly in the affirmative. But at once the President, refusing to see the member who rose to continue the discussion, announced that, the formal exercises being now concluded, tea would be served; and she descended to the floor, where muttered rebellion prevailed.

"I never heard anything so outrageous in my life!"; "Utterly unparliamentary"; "Plain despotism"; "What *could* she be thinking of?"; "She'll never be reëlected in the world"; "Dished herself completely"; "Gratuitous insult to the whole club." These

phrases flew from lip to lip, circulating swifter than the tea-cups and hotter than the steaming urn. But if the President perceived that anything was amiss she did not show it. She seemed wholly absorbed in a conversation with Mrs. Smythe — or at least in listening to Mrs. Smythe's conversation — and she listened, moreover, with an air of such extreme and flattering deference as she had never been observed to display toward any one else. She was often complained of for being a trifle brusque in her manners.

"Positively," whispered the Treasurer mournfully, for she was a loyal soul and disapproved of her superior officer with reluctance, "she's *servile* to the woman! What *does* it mean?"

Just then the pair under discussion approached the tea-table and introductions took place. Mrs. Branscombe, who was pouring, offered the disturbing but dazzling stranger a cup of tea.

"Yes," said Mrs. Smythe, smiling vividly. "Thank you, I believe I will — but may I pour it myself? Other people never put in enough sugar, and it's unwholesome without; in fact, positively dangerous. The narcotic requires an antidote. If you'd allow me to take your place for a moment —" She continued to smile, and waited, evidently expecting Mrs. Branscombe to vacate her chair on her behalf. That lady colored a little and looked helplessly at the President.

"Dear Mrs. Branscombe," said the President sweetly, "I *really* think you would find it a relief to exchange for a little while. If Mrs. Smythe will be kind enough."

A crimson flush mounted slowly to the tips of Mrs. Branscombe's ears and flooded the roots of her dignified gray pompadour. She rose in silence and surrendered her place, then, turning her gray silk shoulders squarely on the intruders, sailed rustling down the hall to its most remote extremity, while Mrs. Smythe settled herself tranquilly to pour. "Three lumps?" she inquired of the President. "*One?* Oh, no! Not less than three; I never give less than three; it isn't safe, I assure you. The active principle of tea is a poison, you know, and it requires three at least to counteract it. Green tea takes seven and coffee nine. I'll compromise on four. Now, you'll find that delicious, I'm sure you will!"

"Yes, it *is* delicious," assented the President, meekly. "I'll always take four after this. You are quite right."

The Secretary came up, looking unwontedly shy and reluctant, to be presented. She was handed a cup of tea with five lumps in it and one in the saucer. She was not in the habit of taking sugar at all, but she made no objection, and drained the cup. She even accepted another and drank that; but there was not much of it to drink, because seven lumps of sugar almost filled it solid.

"Did you ever —" asked Mrs. Smythe, daintily trying to stir the stiff and sticky mass of half-melted sugar she had served to herself — "did you ever hear whether Lucrezia Borgia used Orange Pekoe or Tetley's India and Ceylon? I'm sure she would have had a perfect taste in teas. The basis of all tea is a narcotic poison, and she was such an expert in poisons." (The President set down her second cup unfinished, and the Secretary thought better of a third.) "Or the Marchioness de Brinvilliers, now. *She* would have known all about it. She was so clever."

Few others approached the tea-table, and those who did had their tea served to them with not less than three lumps of sugar, willy-nilly. Their preferences went for nothing. They wondered, but less than they would at another time, for the groups that buzzed so steadily and eagerly throughout the hall had more exciting things to talk of in the wonderful speech of the Dulverton President, her extraordinary participation in the business of their club, and their own President's unbelievable lapse from law, custom and courtesy in her behavior of the afternoon. There were but four silent tongues. The Englishwoman, since she no longer had any opportunity to utter her H-less encouragement to oratory, had fallen silent and sat forgotten, and looking rather sullen, beside one of the two strange women who had been the latest comers to the meeting. This woman, too, was silent, and had a watchful air. Her companion, a person with tight lips and steady eyes, had begun to make her way through the crowd toward the trio at the tea-table. When she reached them, she touched Mrs. Smythe lightly on the arm. That lady glanced up and her radiant face grew obstinate and clouded.

"I won't come!" she said hurriedly. "I will *not!* I'll give you a cup of tea if you want it; but I won't come away with you."

"I don't want any tea, thank you," answered the new-comer, "and I thought you didn't care for it either. The coffee and chocolate are in another room, downstairs, and I thought we would go down and have some. But it's no matter, if you don't care to. Perhaps your friend will come with me instead?" She turned with something of command in her face to the President, who assented immediately.

"But you really must come too, Mrs. Smythe," she entreated rather breathlessly. "You haven't seen our downstairs room yet — and neither have your friends from Dulverton." Mrs. Smythe hesitated; then rose.

They paused on the way to speak to the lady in the pink and green bonnet, sitting dumb and neglected in a corner, and she readily joined them. At the door the Englishwoman and her seat-mate added themselves to the party, and they all passed out together — to the downstairs room that had no existence! Shortly after their departure a messenger arrived with a telegram for the Secretary. A little later the President returned alone and it was handed to her as she entered. Then she and the Secretary made their way, eagerly talking, back to the platform. The Secretary seated herself at her little table, and once more the President picked up the gavel and rapped for order. There was an instant and astonished hush.

"Ladies," said the President, "I hold in my hand a telegram from Mrs. Smythe, President of the Dulverton Woman's Club, regretting that, owing to an epidemic of measles which has affected the families of two out of the three delegates who were to have visited us to-day, the delegation cannot come, and asks leave to attend some future meeting instead. Of the five strangers who have been present with us this afternoon, two were nurses from the Dulverton Insane Asylum, and the other three were escaped patients, of whom they were in search. One of these was Eleanor Adriance Smith, the distinguished journalist whose mind gave out last year from overwork. It was she who addressed the Club. You may have observed that a note was sent up to the desk shortly before she began to speak. It was from one of the nurses, informing the Secretary and myself of the situation and warning us that Mrs. Smith would probably attempt to take part in the

proceedings, as she quite retains her natural abilities in oratory and likes to display them. It also stated that it would not be wise to cross her in any way, since her temper is very uncertain, and her delusions tend toward homicidal mania. Under the circumstances, I think a motion would be in order to the effect that all proceedings subsequent to the acceptance of the report of the Committee on Purchasing an Encyclopedia be omitted from the records, and recognized as invalid by the Club. If some one will kindly offer such a motion, the Chair will be grateful."

The motion was made and carried, though not very promptly, because the excitement was so great that it was hard to extract anything orderly out of the commotion of mingled exclamations, questions, congratulations, reminiscent terrors and relieved applause, in which all the members seemed to be indulging at once. But at last the thing was done, and again the platform was left deserted. The President, brushing aside a swarm of felicitating friends, went at once to the tea-table where Mrs. Branscombe's charming gray head and pink old cheeks were again reflected in the shining samovar.

"*Dear* Mrs. Branscombe!" she sighed, wearily but happily, sinking into the nearest chair, "I know you've forgiven me, and I've come to you for comfort. My nerves are in rags. I want a perfect cup of tea, and you can give it to me. Thanks, *one* lump — not four — oh, delicious! — yes, *quite* perfect — *thank* you."

The Woman's Club of Hentley has never had another meeting so irregularly conducted. Its more spiteful members say it has never had another so interesting.

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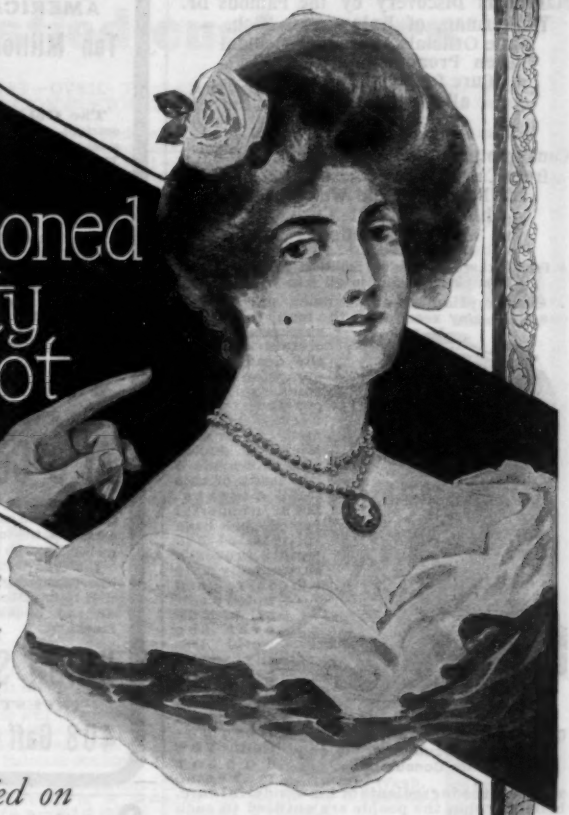

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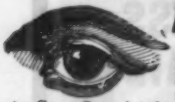

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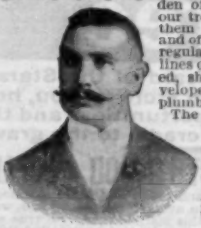

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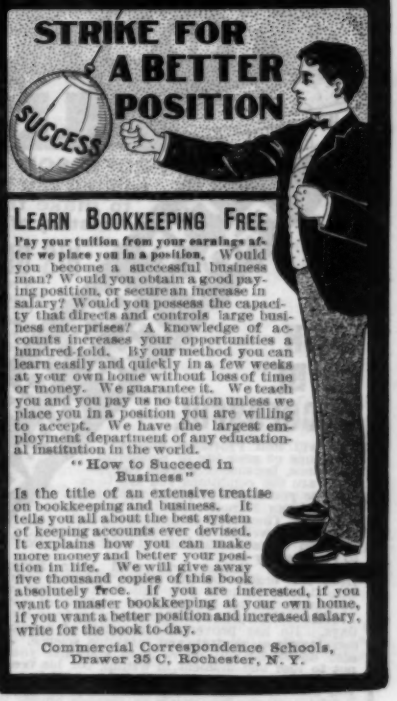

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Letters Worth Reading.

It is interesting, as indicating how people look upon a really pure and wholesome article of food, to reprint a few of the thousands of letters received by the Cream of Chocolate Company, of Danvers, Mass., whose announcement appears on the last cover page of this issue of THE BLACK CAT.

Manchester, Vt., May 8, 1902. Gentlemen: — I am asked by the ladies of the Monday Club to send you a "vote of thanks" for the Cream of Chocolate I served to them yesterday. I made the simplest use of it possible, just added hot water for a delicious drink, also hot water for "frosting," and made the candy with white of egg. We were all convinced it was invaluable, being so quickly prepared, and all were greatly pleased with it. For my own part, you surprised me by your prompt response to my request, and by your very large sample. You will hear from me again when it is gone, as I shall want it in my supply closet hereafter. — MRS. EDW. C. ORVIS, Equinox House, Manchester, Vt.

Dilley, Ore., May 6, 1902. Gentlemen: — I have just returned home, bringing with me my first baby girl, who is, I think, a fine advertisement of the merits of your Cream of Chocolate, for I used it and am using it constantly, and find it a very satisfactory beverage for the requirements of a nursing mother. I brought it to the attention of both physician and nurse, who are going to recommend it in their practice. Wishing you all success, I remain sincerely yours, MRS. B. G. MASTERS.

Chicago Domestic Science Training School, 53 Dearborn St., Elizabeth O. Hiller, Principal, May 10, 1902. Gentlemen: — I have been in the lecture field almost constantly since the receipt of the can of Cream of Chocolate, and to-day is the first opportunity I have had for testing it. I prepared a delicious pitcher of chocolate. I also used it as a frosting for cake. It is needless to say to you people that the result was satisfactory. I should have this on my demonstration table in the lecture work. Very truly yours, ELIZABETH O. HILLER.

612 No. Hayne Ave., Chicago, Ill., May 17, 1902. Gentlemen: — I think your Cream of Chocolate is fine; am using it constantly now. Yours very truly, MRS. E. C. BADENOCH.

1628 Amelia St., New Orleans, La., May 29, 1902. Gentlemen: — Have received your Cream of Chocolate and find it delicious, even more than you claim for it. Yours truly, MISS L. M. GUYOL, Pres. Health Cooking Club.

F. Violet Sanborn, Directress and Instructress Journal Free Cooking School, Chicago, May 27, 1902. Gentlemen: — I will say that I am so convinced with the purity, economy and convenience of Cream of Chocolate that I am willing to use your recipes in place of my own, provided you will permit me, if necessary, to make any slight changes in them, and allow me the privilege of selecting the recipes. I have been recommending Cream of Chocolate the last few days among my friends in the social world. Wishing you all possible success, I remain very truly yours, F. VIOLET SANBORN.

728 No. Court St., Rockford, Ill., June 2, 1902. Gentlemen: — The 5-pound can of Cream of Chocolate came safely. I have served it to several friends and shall recommend it to many. It is delicious. I will enclose you a list of addresses of parties who will be likely to be interested in Cream of Chocolate. Yours very truly, CARRIE ASHTON JOHNSON.

198 Broadway, So. Boston, Mass., June 26, 1902. Gentlemen: — After once using Cream of Chocolate people will not accept any other, as they will be convinced that Roberts' Cream of Chocolate is superior to all others. Very respectfully, M. F. CHEMIN, Young Ladies Charitable Association.

426 E. Buffalo St., Ithaca, N. Y., June 28, 1902. Gentlemen: — Will you please let me know the price of a can of Cream of Chocolate, with postage, and I will send money for it. I have been using it all winter, and think it the finest preparation of Chocolate I ever drank. I live in Kansas City and the dealers there keep it. I am visiting here and cannot get it. I want my friends to try it, I praise it up so. Yours very truly, MISS CATHERINE SPENCER.

New Haven, Vt., June 12, 1902. Gentlemen: — I congratulate you. You have found the perfection of beverages. Truly yours, E. G. HUNT.

Montreal, June 17, 1902. Gentlemen: — I must say your Cream of Chocolate is a marvellous preparation. It is so delicious, and possesses the added advantage of being prepared so quickly and easily. Kindly let me know the name of the dealer in Montreal who has it. Sincerely yours, DR. J. A. SYLVESTER.

Holden, Mo., June 17, 1902. Gentlemen: — We are handling your Cream of Chocolate and are pleased to say it gives entire satisfaction to our customers. Respectfully, CLARK & CRAIG.

Skowhegan, Me., June 21, 1902. Gentlemen: — We have used your Cream of Chocolate in our cooking club, and find it very satisfactory, and are glad to endorse its merits. Yours very truly, MRS. BERTHA STEWARD, Pres. Skowhegan Cooking Club.

Quincy, Mass., June 26, 1902. Gentlemen: — I find your Cream of Chocolate excellent, both in cooking and as a beverage. I send you the names of a few of my friends, so you can send them samples. Very truly yours, MRS. M. L. BOSWORTH.

2208 13th St., N. W. Washington, D. C., June 30, 1902. Gentlemen: — I have been using Cream of Chocolate and have always found it the most satisfactory preparation made from the cocoa bean. I would never again think of using any other while Cream of Chocolate is obtainable. Very truly yours, MRS. C. A. KETCHUM.

203 Slocum Ave., Syracuse, N. Y., July 12, 1902. Gentlemen: — We are using your Cream of Chocolate and like it immensely. Will you kindly send samples and recipe books to those whose names I give you. Sincerely yours, MISS G. P. BISHOP.

14 Chase St., Beverly, Mass., July 12, 1902. Gentlemen: — I got one of your sample boxes and was so pleased with it that I have since bought a box, and will be a constant user of Cream of Chocolate. Hoping to receive your recipe book as soon as possible, I remain yours respectfully, MRS. M. J. ELDRIDGE.

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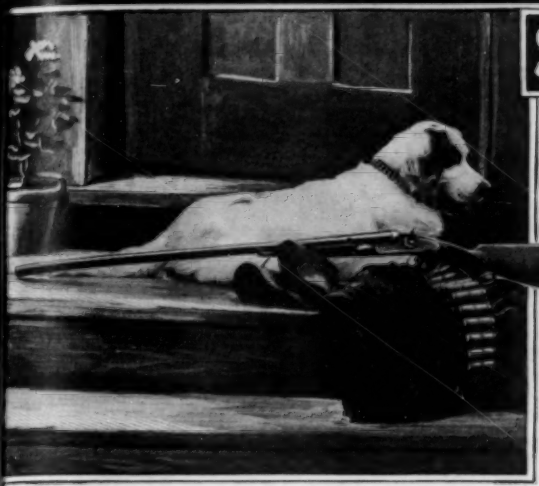

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